



It's a near embarrassing gap in my pastoral resume, that I have never been part of a full-scale Easter Vigil service. So, for those unaware, if we really wanted to go all-in with this worship experience tonight, there would be 14 readings from Scripture: starting with the Creation story, then the flood with Noah, before moving onto Abraham, and then the Exodus from Egypt, with a few passages from the prophets and Proverbs and the Psalms thrown in there for good measure, and then one hardly ever heard from in Daniel with him being saved from a fiery furnace and the wonderful Biblical names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And then there's the Sunday school favorite Jonah's escape from the whale before finally getting to the long-sought after finale in the Resurrection. O, and by the way, there's supposed to be sung responses to each of those 14 readings. Well, and then there's supposed to be a time for all the people waiting to be baptized in the church: for all of them to be taken care of in this service as well. So, safe to say, if we were to really max out on our cherished Lutheran worship full-scale liturgy on this rather big night in the church calendar, we would be here for...quite a while, to put it mildly.

But of all the readings that could have been included for our own humble rendition tonight, the one from Romans, which is usually number 13 in the full lineup, by the way; the one from Romans still hits home for me. Because, for the longest time, I remember speaking the same Confession & Forgiveness wording to start every worship: "We confess we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves, but if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." All well and good, but then all of a sudden there was a change-up. Instead, this passage was proclaimed as a reminder of our shortcomings, to be sure, but also of the ultimate promise: that we may walk in newness of life, as if Christ insisted that death could not be the end for him or for us, too. And not only that, but to ensure that we do not stay stuck in dismal hopelessness and contagious gloom over the times we messed up; that we do not succumb into believing as if we have no impact to make at all anymore, because this Jesus Christ is about to insist otherwise.

It's possible the passage just hit home to me at that time during my younger years, because the same words spoken for every Confession & Forgiveness for seemingly every worship I had experienced had eventually fallen flat. I'm sure I was, deep down, wondering where I was in my life, wondering where I fit into any story, let alone God's story. And perhaps that is part of the reason why some churches insist on doing the full-scale Easter Vigil service: to hear this immense story of God's persistent love and grace and empowerment, and to realize that you too are part of that captivating Divine story. And that what Christ brings to life this weekend, is not just to fulfill a prophecy, not just for beautified religious language used in a sanctuary or on Biblical pages. Christ brings it all to life this weekend, for you, too.

So, soon enough, we'll hear the grand finale for our own humble rendition of Easter Vigil: the Gospel finale that reassures us that neither death, nor what happens in this life, or anything else that emerges in all Creation, will be able to separate you and all of us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus, our Lord. So, for that Greatest News fulfilled this night, and the story that still carries on in your own life, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!